The concept of migratory careers: Elements for a new theoretical perspective of contemporary human mobility

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Abstract

The article offers a relatively new theoretical framework articulating macro, meso and micro levels of analysis of the migration process, which often are disconnected in the sociology of migration. This alternative approach rests on the classical sociological concept of career. The concept of migratory career integrates structures of opportunities, individual characteristics and networks to make sense of the migratory experience. This concept helps us to fill the gap between scholars of migration and people's movement on the one hand, and scholars of integration and incorporation in the new country, on the other hand. Migratory career must be considered as an additional concept to the traditional concepts such as integration, assimilation or incorporation, which are mainly focused on the situation of migrants in the receiving country. Furthermore, the use of the concept of migratory career allows to connect the theoretical thinking on migration to mainstream sociological theories.

Keywords

Career, incorporation, integration, migration

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Introduction

Migration is an inescapable feature of the beginning of this century, and is very likely to continue throughout it. How could it be otherwise considering the number of existing and even increasing migratory pressures on a worldwide scale (demographic and economic inequalities, environmental and political changes, desire for better living conditions, globalization, etc.) and the technological possibilities for human mobility? In spite of restrictive immigration policies, borders between states remain more or less easy to cross. Most countries experience a 'migratory situation' since they face both more or less wanted immigration flows. Clearly the management of migration flows has become a real global challenge. Globalization creates new 'spaces of flows' (Castells, 1996). Migration patterns are increasingly diversified and complex and they challenge the state-of-the-art migration theories. New theoretical developments are needed to better make sense of contemporary patterns of human mobility.

In this context, the article precisely proposes a new theorization of contemporary migration dynamics based on the sociological classical concept of career. In the first part, we address the main shortcomings in migration studies, which call for new ways to theorize the migration process. In the second part, we discuss the sociological concept of career as it was introduced several decades ago in American sociology and we apply it in the field of migration. In the concluding part, we discuss the added value of the introduction of the concept of migratory career in migration studies in comparison with alternative concepts such as assimilation, incorporation and integration.

Migration studies: A synthetic critique

Much has been written across a wide range of academic disciplines analysing migration processes, usually relying on a single dimension of the social reality: macro, meso or micro. Macro-based works in particular insist on social relations and global economics. The works of economists, demographers and historians (Borjas, 1989; Stark, 1991; Wallerstein, 1974) insist upon economic and demographic differentials, respectively, between countries of emigration and those of immigration though the explanatory models proposed differ according to the approach used. Meso approaches have experienced a number of developments in recent years (Faist, 2010). A classic meso approach analyses the labour market as a segmented structure that creates opportunities for employment-based immigration (Piore, 1979) while preventing migrant workers from entering into certain sectors of the market. While public policies have often been neglected in the past (Massey, 1999), many works by political scientists, lawyers and sociologists stress the degree of openness or 'closeness' of public policies to explain migratory flows (Castles and Miller, 2003; Guild, 2009; Hollifield, 1992). Also from a meso perspective, other research underlines the essential role played by social networks as an explanatory source for migration (Massey, 1999). Goss and Lindquist (1995) propose a complimentary approach to this suggesting the concept of 'migrant institutions' which moves beyond the tension between individual motivations and structural causalities. Their approach consists of the relationship between the agents (individuals, associations, companies, institutions, etc.) who have specific interests and roles within an institutional environment that

defines the collective rules and the spaces of opportunity, while being defined by the actions of individuals. The micro level explains migration through socio-psychological factors and motivations, and relies on a perspective focused strictly on the individual (Richmond, 1994). Here, migration is explained by migrants' own desire to improve their quality of life (Ferris, 1985). Sometimes, the potential migrant is seen as a rational *Homo economicus* who decides to leave only when after a calculation is made, she or he reaches the conclusion that the expected benefits of migration sufficiently exceed the expected cost of leaving or that the costs of staying are much greater than the costs of leaving.

Several problematic features characterize research on international migration and its consequences. First, some topics and issues are very well known while others are seriously understudied, like, for example, the importance of arts and culture in the life of migrants. One of the first books dealing with that issue was published in 2010 (DiMaggio and Fernandez-Kelly, 2010). In this area, the concept of migratory career could open fruitful perspectives to make sense of the specific migration experience and circulation of artists who very often connect different parts of the world with their artistic practice. Second, research is very much fragmented along disciplinary lines. Even though everyone agrees in principle that migration is a 'total social phenomenon' (Mauss, 1968) that should be studied jointly by different scientific disciplines in collaboration with each other, this has very seldom been the case. The much needed dialogue between disciplines remains to be launched in concrete research programmes. At best, perspectives from different disciplines have been presented next to one another in the same volume (Brettell and Hollifield, 2000). Third, there is a methodological separation between 'quantitativists' and 'qualitativists', which reflects, to a certain extent, the disciplinary fragmentation mentioned above. The result is the lack of a comprehensive approach to migration and post-migration dynamics. Fourth, specialists of migration movements and specialists on the various issues linked to integration do not usually work together. This creates the illusion that migration flows and integration are somewhat distinct phenomena that can be studied separately. This distinction has even less relevance with the development of transnational practices irrespective of the definition used of transnationalism: transmigrants (Glick-Schiller, 1999) transnational community (Portes, 1996) or transnational social spaces (Faist, 2000). The analysis of migrant practices limited to the situation in the country of settlement is insufficient. It is also worthwhile to propose a theoretical framework that allows for the simultaneous study of incorporation processes in both the countries of origin and destination. Fifth, it is also indeed necessary to bring together studies addressing classic migration processes with those examining experiences of mobility. The increase in mobility accelerates the construction of global classes (Sassen, 2007), transnational professionals (Nowicka, 2006) and transnational communities in cosmopolitan universes. Also, besides production-led mobility of an either highly qualified or non-qualified nature, there is a growing consumption-led mobility which ranges from classic tourist mobility to different forms of more or less temporary migrations (e.g. pensioners). There is not currently a relevant scientific argument justifying the separation of the theoretical frameworks used to analyse the experiences of mobility or settlement of the highly skilled, labelled expatriates; of the low-skilled, labelled migrants or even those of asylum-seekers. The separation between these two forms of analysis and

labelling often denotes the pejorative connotation associated with migration – that it constitutes a threat – and the positive connotation associated with the concept of mobility – that it is an expression of freedom and of wealth. Scholars who employ this distinction (migration versus mobility) have introduced these political (institutions, laws, political discourse, etc.) and media labels into scientific discourse. The concept of migratory career helps us to bypass this distinction. The same concept, migratory career, could be used for analysing migration of high-skilled and low-skilled workers, migrants and expatriates, short- and long-term mobility, mobility between two countries and mobility among several countries. Finally, Stephen Castles is right to state that migration research is not sufficiently linked to theoretical development found in the social sciences (Castles, 2010). Migration research often remains in a kind of theoretical self-marginalization. It does not use the latest advances of the social sciences and it does not aspire to contribute to general social theory.

The aim of this article is to overcome these problems by providing a different perspective on the migration process seen comprehensively and globally in all its dimensions. In our view, the analysis of contemporary migration requires us to look both more broadly and more closely at migration dynamics. Migration is not the result of any single effect of one of the three factors often articulated: the agency of the migrant, the internalization of socio-economic structural constraints directing migrants without their consent, or the impact of political decisions. Contemporary migrations are confronted with a growing uncertainty, notably linked to public policies of security and border control. Migrants must also deal with the unexpected, which may occur along the migratory path or during the settlement process. Based on several studies of newcomers in Belgium (Adam et al., 2002; Martiniello et al., 2010; Marx et al., 2009; Rea and Wets, 2014; Timmerman et al., 2012), we offer a new analytical framework utilizing the concept of 'migratory careers' – borrowing this concept from Becker (1991 [1963]) and Hughes (1937) – to demonstrate the relevance of careers in the study of migration. The aim in using the concept of career is to provide a novel theoretical framework in migration studies that articulates levels of analysis (macro, micro and meso) traditionally dealt with separately in the sociology of migration. In fact, for about 50 years, the social sciences have posed the question of the utility of different levels of analysis in order to understand international migration. Of note, it is a difficult challenge to propose, within the scholarly literature, an explanatory framework that jointly considers these three levels of analysis, which have been traditionally disconnected in the social sciences. This article attempts to provide the elements of such an integrated theoretical framework in order to make sense of the migration process in a comprehensive manner.

From the concept of career to the concept of migratory careers

The expression 'migratory career' is not new. It appears in many works (Massey, 1999; Péraldi, 2002; Rouleau-Berger, 2010). A quick check on Google scholar for the expressions 'migration careers' and 'migratory careers' provides more than 300 references. These expressions are mainly used with three meanings. First, migration career is often used as a synonym of the professional career of migrant workers (Lozano Ascencio,

2000). Second it refers broadly and vaguely to the migration experience. Third, it is used as a synonym for itinerary, or trajectories referring to the geographical mobility of migrants between a point of departure and a point of arrival. But with very few exceptions (Cvajner and Sciortini, 2010) the expression of migration or migratory career has not been formalized and conceptualized. Cvajner and Sciortino discuss it and operationalize it in the specific case of irregular migration. They define 'migratory career' as being 'a sequence of steps, each marked by events that are defined as significant within the structure of the actors' narratives and publicly recognised as such by various audiences'. They believe this notion of 'career' – originally developed by Hughes (1937) and Becker (1991 [1963]) and further developed by social systems theory (Luhmann, 2002) – is particularly useful for analysing the dynamic processes of international irregular migration (Cvajner and Sciortino, 2010: 214). We also propose starting from the definition proposed by Becker in *Outsiders* (1991 [1963]) but we do not endorse the Luhmannian theory of systems, which added value is not clear in Cvajner and Sciortino's article. Additionally, we make the claim that the concept of 'migratory career' is useful to analyse all forms of international migration and not only irregular migration.

Although the concept of career is often used to analyse the role of work in organization and individual lives (Gunz and Peiperl, 2007), we will rather refer to the sociological concept introduced by Becker. Becker uses the concept of career to put forth an explanatory and diachronic analysis of deviance. Becker defines career as a process of changing status or position, though for Becker the concept moves beyond the classic conception defining the professional career as a succession of jobs held by an individual. The passage from one step to the next of the career occurs via a learning process through which the actor, on the one hand, learns a specific practice – how to smoke marijuana or to play jazz, for example – and on the other, constructs a representation of this activity which permits the person to preserve an acceptable self-image. It consists of a simultaneous learning process of a practice and of a change in social identity. Becker borrows this concept for use in the sociology of work and sociology of professions wherein its use is principally in the analysis of professional mobility. Nevertheless, the concept also appears applicable to other fields and helps to explain different social phenomena related to the adoption of identity, of a way of life or even of specific behaviours. Thus, Hughes notes:

> Careers in our society are thought of very much in terms of jobs, for these are the characteristic and crucial connections of the individual with the institutional structure. … But the career is by no means exhausted in a series of business and professional achievements. There are other points at which one's life touches the social order, other lines of social accomplishment-influence, responsibility, and recognition. … A woman may have a career in holding together a family or in raising it to a new position. Some people of quite modest occupational achievements have careers in patriotic, religious, and civic organization. (Hughes, 1937: 410–411)

Furthermore, our use of the concept of career in the field of migration does in no way equate migration with deviant activity. On the contrary, the analysis of deviant careers, as proposed by Becker, can be useful particularly for analysing how some forms of mobility are considered as deviant behaviour (i.e. irregular migration) whereas others are

considered as normal (people from wealthy countries taking their vacations or retiring in poor countries). Becker notes:

> Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance. … From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of application by others of the rules and sanctions to an offender. (Becker, 1991 [1963]: 9)

By adopting this perspective, we can say that it is the restrictive immigration laws that construct particular groups as rule-breakers and treat certain forms of mobility as deviant behaviour or even a crime. Some politicians, bureaucrats and journalists who describe migration as a threat could be considered as 'moral entrepreneurs' as conceptualized by Becker.

Based on this preliminary definition, which takes into account the characteristics attributed to careers and having as background the works from the sociology of migration, it is possible to delineate some constitutive dimensions of the migratory career concept. According to Becker, the career path is changing. The career is not forever fixed and unidirectional. It evolves over time. For Hughes (1937), the motivations of a person to pursue a career rarely remain unchanged due to experience and the passing of time. The career is built, therefore, both objectively and subjectively. The concept of career is very suitable for the study of immigrant trajectories. First, the migratory career is constructed objectively by a legal-institutional and socio-economic path. Second, it is also built subjectively, based on the confrontation between initial expectations and real-life migration experiences. This subjective dimension gives a sociological depth to the career as a diachronic construct subject to change. The conception of what is possible in the eyes of the migrant changes over time with the change in legal status for example. It is therefore necessary to study the changes in objective legal statuses occupied by the migrant in relation to directional shifts accorded by migrants in their plans, their goals and the actions undertaken to achieve them. It is precisely in this way that the concept of career should not be confused with either the notion of trajectory or itinerary, often used in social science research and focused only on the objective dimension. In fact, some studies which make use of the notions of trajectory and itinerary place too much importance on the steps involved in the mobility and settlement processes, limiting the analysis to people's changes in status and losing sight of the associated change in social identity.

From our own research (Adam et al., 2002; Martiniello et al., 2010; Rea and Wets, 2014; Timmerman et al., 2012), the birth of a first-born child can, for some migrant women, hold greater importance in the definition of their social identity than the position that they occupy in the labour market. This event plays a more important role than other factors in the orientation of their migratory career. Obtaining residency documents for the undocumented migrants does not necessarily result in them settling down definitively in the country of settlement. The regularity of the stay gives access to many resources such as regular work, social security, social housing, etc. But many interviews carried out with regularized migrants demonstrate that their new identity is not to be a regular foreigner but to become a legitimate mover. The first project of regularized migrants is in general to visit their family in the country of origin without being afraid of not being able

to come back to the country where they live now. To be free movers becomes one of the first subjective identities of many regularized migrants (Adam et al., 2002).

The second career dimension is the notion of success and failure. For Becker there must be a motivating force behind the career of an actor. In order to understand a career, one must first be able to understand the plan (or plans) and the strategy (or strategies) pursued. A career is a process that tends towards achievement, success. Hughes (1937) frequently cites these notions, to which he attributes that of 'prestige'. One must avoid the particularity of the definition of success based on objective criteria. There is no one 'right' way for the migrant to build his or her (migratory) career. Instead, the migratory career is not unequivocal because there are often multiple objectives being pursued. Several paths are possible and bifurcations can appear. To the extent that the focus is on the entire process – and not the stages – the study of subjective success offers interesting prospects. The notions of success or, as noted by Becker and Strauss (1956), failure are:

> … a matter of perspective. Many positions represent failure to some but not to others. For the middle-class white, becoming a caseworker in a public welfare agency may mean failure; but for the Negro from the lower-middle class the job may be a real prize. (Becker and Strauss, 1956: 257)

This statement remains very much relevant within the context of migration, replacing 'white' by 'national' and 'negro' by 'migrant'.

The success and the failure of a career must be analysed by taking into account the values and norms of the host society and of the society of origin. Usually the success of a migrant career is associated to the success in the economic field. The accumulation of money thanks to hard work and the access to luxury consumption could be considered as the indicators of a successful migrant career. For migrants of the second generation the success means upward social mobility thanks to education. Work and education are two legitimate factors explaining the social mobility of the migrants and their descendants in the host society and in the society of origin. However, the perception of success could also be dependent on the values and norms of the society of origin. In some traditional Pakistani, Turkish, Algerian and Moroccan families, the careers of girls are generally more appreciated than those of boys, because the former manage better than the latter in the conciliation of the family values (division of gender role, respect of the culture of origin, etc.) with the success in school education. Besides, the subjective success of a migrant career could be also based on values rejected by some host societies, as for instance being a good Muslim could be more important than to succeed in the economic field. Analysing norms and values suppose the dismissal of any normative definition of integration, especially the national definition of integration of the host receiving country, by taking into account the meaning given by the migrants to their social activities.

It is necessary to examine migrants' perceptions of their situation concerning their goals and the criteria they use to define success and failure and that, over time, give the diachronic character to the migration process. If the notion of success is associated with that of career, we should caution not to fall into excessive voluntarism. The objectives of migrants are not always clearly defined at the outset. Moreover, success is often defined collectively. For example, despite their precarious situation, undocumented migrants

may be forced to stay in their country of settlement because, for their friends and family back home, the mere fact that they are in another country is a success in itself (Martiniello et al., 2010).

For Hughes (1937: 405), (legal) 'status refers only to that part of one's role which has a standard definition in the mores or in law'. According to Sayad (1991), an immigrant's status is simultaneously social, political and legal. The legal dimension functions by influencing the social reality through defining an immigrant's place in his or her new society. Using the legal dimension of status seems, therefore, to be appropriate when speaking of careers constructed in the field of migration. Legal status is important because it influences the mobilization of migrants' resources; strategies linked to stay and even the general direction of migration patterns (Adam et al., 2002). Between them, all statuses are not equal. In Europe, they are organized hierarchically in concentric circles from the centre where the rights are more extensive, to the periphery where precariousness reigns. This type of stratification has led Martiniello (2000) to describe Europe as having a 'tri-level structure of citizenship'. The value of the same social and/or legal status may vary according to migrant pattern. Becker speaks of recruits to undesirable positions also coming from the ranks of the transients, who, because they feel that they are on their way to something different and better, can afford temporarily to do something infra dig, and 'he thereby risks committing himself to an alternative occupational career' (Becker and Strauss, 1956: 258–260). One can easily see the parallel with the situation of some migrants present in western countries who remain 'stuck' in precarious or irregular statuses.

The literature reports a professionalization of migration. With the idea of a trade or profession, an assumption emerges that migrants ought to possess particular skills which qualify them as being more or less able to engage in the activity of migration. Becker and Strauss (1956: 257) already mentioned the fact that the analysis 'of careers must also be sensitized to discover what training is essential or highly important to the passage from one status to another'. The existence of specific skills for such migration activity is often mentioned. It is often about the savoir-faire or of various capitals (cultural, economic, social and symbolic) at the disposal of the migrant. However, the range of skills is sometimes substantially larger. For instance, undocumented migrants learn not to stay for long periods of time in public spaces (streets, squares, etc.) in order to avoid police controls. To access some resources (work, housing, etc.), they favour bounded solidarity and the relations in their community over institutional relations. The skills include knowledge of migration policies, various opportunities available in potential countries of destination and forms of cross-border mobility. Skills are also of a commercial, organizational, political, identity or relational nature. Some skills are built outside of the state and develop through autonomous networks of the public sphere in order to 'thwart systems of control' (Streiff-Fenart, 2002). These skills contribute to the construction of a mobility capital necessary for the migratory journey itself. In the country of settlement these skills are equally mobilized in order to achieve a documented (legal) status and to move out of a precarious condition. Learning the management of invisibility and of labelling as well as the practices for 'removing labels' is also part of the career. The analysis of skills needs to be done in conjunction with the identification of the difficulties of the migratory career. Indeed, Becker (1991 [1963]: 102) states that 'the career lines characteristic of an

occupation take their shape from problems peculiar to that occupation'. From this viewpoint the migrants or the movers acquire new skills creating a form of capital specific to migratory careers: the mobility capital. Contrary to works that rely heavily on a comprehensive understanding of immigration laws, mobility capital is the product of a long learning process. This notion of difficulty is of real interest in the analysis of migratory careers in the sense that it is possible to quantify problematic situations and to analyse how the acquired skills mitigate them.

The concept of career – according to Becker – stands out due to the centrality accorded to culture. Indeed, 'the individual learns, in short, to participate in a sub-culture organized around the particular deviant activity' (Becker, 1991 [1963]: 31). This 'subculture' is the result of learning and competes with the standards promoted by the dominant groups. The migration experience creates as well its own culture made up of transposed elements and those of the culture of origin, those borrowed without modification from the culture of settlement and other (newly created) original cultural elements. This unique culture is 'in-between', 'it is neither that of the country of origin nor the country of settlement, but an original product subject to the vicissitudes of socio-historical circumstances' (Moreau and Schleyer-Lindenmann, 2002: 24). The concepts of culture and learning are at the heart of the construction of the migratory career as they explain different fates. This does not mean that all the practices of migrants should be understood as a result of the culture but that culture and learning play a huge role in the construction of changing identities. Becker and Strauss (1956: 262) argue that 'a frame of reference for studying careers is, at the same time, a frame for studying personal identities'. This observation is based on the idea that there is relationship between the change in social position and identity change. It can happen that a normative conflict arises during a career between the actor's personal goals and the constraints of success; its onset can bring about a drastic change in self-conception.

The final dimension is temporal. The career is a process that is built over time. According to Becker and Strauss (1956: 262), 'the timing becomes vital at different periods in different kinds of careers'. It is, for example, easily conceivable that experience learned over time by the actor reorients his or her plans and the goals he or she pursues. But time is not uniform. There is a time 'scanning' in a career. Since the beginning of the sociology of migration, the issue of time has been central, although often associated with settlement or generation. However migration is also subject to the impact of the new technology of communication and information (smartphone, internet, etc.), which produces a time–space distanciation (Giddens, 1990): to be here and there at the same time. The use of NTCI and the reduction of their cost diminish the distance and allow for the maintenance of social relations, and in particular family relations between host country and country of origin. This is particularly the case for transnational families. For instance, we saw that for some women coming from Poland, living in Belgium and working as domestic workers, the use of the cellular phone allows mothers to continue to follow the education of their children in the country of origin. They called them more than five times a day to know whether they went to school, what they ate, at what time they went to sleep. In an Ecuadorian family, a mother living in Belgium used skype to have lunch on Sunday with her family living in Quito despite the time difference.

Moreover, time is also subject to chance. The career is constructed on the basis of reactions to the unexpected. Chance sometimes leads to career bifurcations reinforcing the actor's initial plan, or possibly sending him or her in an unwanted direction. In their research, some scholars tend to adopt a rational choice approach in their analyses of migration processes. From this, migrants, and the *sans-papiers* in particular, are assumed to have a thorough knowledge of immigration laws and are endlessly searching for ways around them in order to satisfy their desire for legal status. One of the ways of obtaining a residency permit is through marriage. For some scholars, marriage has become almost an aspiration, such as in the analysis of Van Meeteren et al. (2009) in terms of legalizing the migrants' stay. By analysing migrants' 'hopes' only according to different forms of mobilized capital, these authors overemphasize the role of individual action, forgetting not only structural and institutional actions, but also that of the unexpected, of chance.

The career described by Becker is not a linear process with a beginning and an end. The proposed perspective attempts to explain the process of building migratory careers. However, it should not be confused with those that – since the birth of the sociology of immigration in Chicago – have sought to divide the integration process into stages. Our analytical framework intends to create a different understanding of contemporary migration phenomena, beyond the limits of 'methodological nationalism', and to provide an analytical framework for international comparisons. The analysis of migratory careers is based on the study of the articulation of three types of factors quite similar to that proposed by Rosenfeld (1992) for professional careers: the individual characteristics of migrants, the opportunity structures and constraints of international migration and the mobilization of resources (social network). By migratory careers, we mean individual and not collective careers.

Becker (1991 [1963]) defines career as resulting in part from the objective facts relating to social structure. Haveman and Cohen (1994) emphasize the value of studying the impact of economic structures on the opportunity structure faced by individuals. Waters and Jiménez (2005) reaffirm the need to take into account the macro level of analysis if we are to understand the current logic of migrant settlements in their host societies. Structural factors may explain the choice of residency for migrants (Massey et al., 2002) and the nature of their transnational activities (Guarnizo et al., 2003). What can be considered as constituting the structural level?

We propose taking an approach in terms of opportunity structures and constraints in order to study the effects of structural determinants; structures as playing the role of both opportunity and constraint in building the migratory career. Pécoud (2004) provides a useful breakdown of the opportunity structure. He distinguishes, on the one hand, 'the politico-legal environment' and, on the other, 'the economic-institutional environment'. In the politico-legal part, the state is a key actor that structures the context of reception or of departure of migrants. It behaves as a mediator of the global forces driving international migration flows and creating different migrant categories and the various forms of citizenship which result (Guild, 2009). Visa policy, entry authorization to the territory, permits for the right to stay and to permanently reside are central here. With regard to immigration policy, some legal provisions now rely on EU directives (family reunification, long-term resident third country nationals), although their implementation may vary from state to state. The national policy on asylum constitutes another element of the

migration opportunity structure. Integration policies of European states and the rules of access to nationality can also become opportunities or constraints in the migrant's choice of destination. Finally, measures related to the fight against racism and discrimination are also potential legal determinants. In short, the entirety of laws and institutions governing the status of foreigners is included in this category.

The economic-institutional part is primarily concerned with the labour market and welfare state policies. Immigration policy is also influenced by the demands of the economic system and the laws governing labour market access. In this post-Fordist period, the immigrant labour market faces a double movement (Rea, 2010): (1) the fragmentation of employment statuses resulting from the institutional rules which compartmentalize them – permanent and fixed-term contracts, work permits, temporary work, seasonal work, subcontracting false self-employed, irregular employment, etc.; and (2) the segmentation of the labour market and the increasing number of segments of 3-D (Dirty, Demanding and Dangerous) jobs for which immigration is called upon (Castles, 2002). The combination of these two movements shapes the current opportunity structure of labour migration. Now more than ever, immigrant labour refers to the dirty work, even if part of migrant labour also provides high levels of qualification (brain drain). At the edge of the politico-legal and the economic-institutional are the policies of the welfare state. For many years, this has been only marginally considered. The difference in immigrant access to social services and welfare benefits – whatever their status – contributes to the opportunity structure. Recently, new political statuses are involved in the opportunity structure. Also recently in some countries, new integration policies (Jacobs and Rea, 2007) have established a link between the success of integration tests and migrants' access to certain social rights; only those who pass become recognized bearers of social rights.

The structure is not the only level of analysis that would explain the construction of the career. The career is built in part by changes in the perspectives, motivations and desires of the individual (Becker, 1991 [1963]), i.e. according to his or her plans. Other individual factors are important and help to explain how structural changes differentially affect the mobility of actors during their careers. Thus, structural effects will affect certain categories of actors differently. The characteristics of the individual interact with the structures and networks to create careers (Haveman and Cohen, 1994; Rosenfeld, 1992). Taking into account the migrant's personal characteristics can counter a homogenizsed and stereotypical view of migrants. According to Guarnizo et al. (2003), the following individual characteristics play a role in the nature of migrants' activities: the length of stay in the host country, nationality, marital status, level of education, age and gender. We can add to this list the legal status related to migration and occupation. These eight characteristics can be used to identify the categorical specificity of the process of constructing the migratory career. Finally, one must be mindful that the skills that migrants identify as necessary for migratory activity may possibly be considered as individual characteristics that influence the construction of the career. Thus, it appears that mobility capital, namely the capacity to be able to move – collected through experience – is an important factor in the migration experience.

To understand the career process, it is not sufficient to know a person's individual characteristics or the opportunity structure and constraints, but we must inevitably

consider their interaction. Rosenfeld (1992) proposes that we think of this interaction through the way in which the actor uses his or her resources. Considering that resources are part of an interdependent relationship; they only exist relationally. If they are relational, resources and their mobilization are clearly an intermediate level. The third level can be understood through the social network that the actor may mobilize in order to optimize the resources at his or her disposal. This approach helps to bridge the theoretical gap between micro and macro sociology (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994). This level of analysis has become an indispensable analytical tool for understanding contemporary migration (Faist, 2010; Grieco, 1998; Guarnizo et al., 2003; Pécoud, 2004, Waters and Jiménez, 2005). Networks are even 'a necessary condition for mobility and develop beyond closed borders or they survive, legally or not, from such borders.' (Wihtol de Wenden, 2001: 10). If the networks of the new migrants are global and international, they are nevertheless local (Hily et al., 2004). However, networks in and of themselves are not enough. It is also important to see the relationships that establish the links between cohesive social and independent networks as outlined by Granovetter (1973), who emphasizes the strength of weak ties. This kind of interdependence between actors is also observable through the phenomenon of *sponsorship*, 'where individuals move up in a work organization through the activities of older and more- well-established men' (Becker and Strauss, 1956: 261). Also, the characteristics of members of migrant support networks are examined to determine to what extent the fact that a migrant has relationships with people having quite different (or quite similar) characteristics influences the mobilization of his or her resources. In resource mobilization, the study of associational participation, whether cultural, social or political, is also essential (Koopmans et al., 2005).

According to Lemieux (1999), the network is a system of social actors in constant change whose goal is the sharing of resources. Indeed, the network is defined as a form of sociability that develops either on the margins or at the heart of institutions, enabling human resources to circulate the resources that can possibly coerce its members and which possesses varying degrees of openness and relationship to the outside. The network is one form of social capital (Portes, 1998). But, like the structural level, the network should not only be regarded as enabling (Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994). Lazega and Lebeaux (1995), for example, demonstrate that social capital can turn into duress when the actors use their relations to put pressure on each other. The resources include the capital structure (*la structure des capitaux*) as defined by Bourdieu (1979) or the typology of resources proposed by Lemieux (1999): normative, material, statutory, human and information resources.

Conclusion

The concept of migratory careers aims at solving some of the already mentioned problematic features that can be found in contemporary theories on migration and incorporation. We can list two of them. The first is the sharp separation in the literature between studies focusing on the processes of emigration and research focused on the processes of immigration. The second is related to the developments of migratory practices that represent alternatives to the classic model of incorporation in the receiving country, i.e. transnational practices with a double presence 'here' and 'there', circular migration and

multiple mobilities (neither 'here' nor 'there'). Definitive and permanent settlement is not the rule for all migrants. This phenomenon is not novel but it has not received analytical attention for a long time. Sociology has not paid enough attention for instance to migrants who decided, at a certain point, to leave the country of immigration and return to the country of origin.

The concept of migratory career is an additional concept and not a substitute to concepts such as assimilation, integration or incorporation, which have been dominating the sociology of immigration since the beginning of the 20th century notably in the American sociology. Those concepts are mainly focused on the receiving country and have suffered from methodological nationalism.

The process of settlement of migrants has been analysed traditionally by using the concepts of assimilation and incorporation (in the United States) and integration (in Europe) (Rea and Tripier, 2008). These approaches are interested in the conditions under which migrants become citizens. From this perspective, the starting point of the migration process is the arrival in the receiving country. Considering that the social life of a migrant starts when he or she arrives in the receiving country is misleading. These approaches overlook the situation of migrants in the country of origin despite Thomas and Znaniecki's (1918), in their seminal work *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, invitation to take this situation into account. In a world where society and state were supposed to overlap, the sociology of migration was intended to understand the ways in which newcomers and their descendants incorporate into the host society, assimilate values, norms, symbolic and cultural patterns and identify the paths of social, economic and political integration. These theories of migration and incorporation see the migration process as being a linear and often unidirectional one. Typically, migrants leave their country and settle in a new one in which they will eventually integrate or assimilate. The only alternative to integration, incorporation or assimilation is the return to the country of origin. This view oversimplifies the migration process, which is not often linear and which is often multidirectional. The migrants' careers are very seldom unidirectional, contrary to what is often assumed in incorporation theories.

During the last century, two main controversies structure the research in sociology of incorporation/integration notably in the United States. The first opposes a non-homogenizing optimistic approach of the assimilation process, which supposes that assimilation leads into 'mainstream culture' (Alba and Nee, 2003; Gordon, 1964; Park and Burgess, 1921) versus a critical approach, which is based mainly on the analysis of the processes of incorporation of the non-European and white migrants in the United States who experiment with a 'segmented assimilation' (Portes and Zhou, 1993) and maintain ethnic identification, ethnic community norms and values. The second controversy is about the relation between assimilation and social mobility of the new second generation: some studies point out the 'downward assimilation' into a 'rainbow underclass' (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001) whereas others show that the second generation are not facing socially downward despite parental disadvantages (Kasinitz et al., 2008; Waldinger and Feliciano, 2004). The same controversy opposes scholars' analysis in the European context. However, contemporary debates in Europe are particularly interested in discussing the failure of integration policy and the crisis of multicultural society (Alba et al., 2012; Crul et al., 2012; Joppke and Morawska, 2003).

Although these theories and concepts are central for analysing the settlement of migrants who choose to become citizens of the host country, these theories are focused on the second generation of migrants and usually on the incorporation of low-skilled migrants. Furthermore, integration or incorporation cannot be considered as a process with a clear end. Integration, or incorporation, is not necessarily reached forever.

The concept of migratory career is promising to make sense of this complexity. This concept takes into account structural determinants, resources and social networks both in the country of origin and the receiving country; it allows for thinking self-identification processes at each stage of the migratory career and it includes people who have lived in more than one national context in the analytical framework. Furthermore, the concept of migratory career uses a same theoretical framework for low-skilled and high-skilled migrants (migrants versus expatriates).

Our concept emphasizes the experiences of persons and groups and offers tools to understand the meaning of social careers when society and nation-states does not overlap, as this is the case with globalization. It reconciles migration studies and incorporation studies by looking at the whole process of migration. The added value of the concept of migratory career as an alternative to the notions of trajectory, itinerary and integration is also to grasp more easily the non-linear and multidirectional character of contemporary migration patterns.

By the end of this article, the merits of the application of Becker's career concept to new migration seem clear. Through the original reconstruction of the concept of migratory career, this article seeks to propose a tool for better understanding contemporary migration in a comprehensive way. Furthermore, it also aims to include the issue of migration, not in a thematic sub-sociology, but at the very centre of sociological theory itself. The proposed analysis, which is not without potential criticism, suggests notably but not exclusively that the construction of typologies are better able to integrate the three levels of analysis: the structures (macro level), the networks (meso level) and the individual as agent (micro level), through the collection of quantitative and/or qualitative data. The concept of migratory career aims to promote an approach integrating interactionist and structuralist perspectives. This article also shows that relative theoretical innovation can be rooted in classical sociology and serve both the field of migration studies and hopefully the broader social sciences as well.

Funding

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Résumé

Cet article propose un nouveau cadre théorique articulant tous les niveaux d'analyse (macro, meso et micro) du processus de migration, souvent déconnectés dans les études sociologiques de la migration. Cette approche alternative repose sur le concept sociologique classique de carrière. La notion de carrière migratoire intègre les structures d'opportunités, les caractéristiques individuelles et les réseaux pour permettre d'appréhender l'expérience migratoire. Ce concept nous aide à combler l'écart entre les spécialistes de la migration et de la circulation des personnes, d'une part, et les experts de l'intégration et de l'assimilation dans le nouveau pays, d'autre part. La carrière migratoire peut être considérée comme une abstraction supplémentaire aux traditionnels concepts d'intégration ou d'assimilation, qui ont privilégié la situation des migrants dans le pays d'accueil. En outre, l'utilisation du concept de carrière migratoire permet de rattacher la pensée théorique de la migration aux théories classiques de la sociologie.

Mots-clés

Processus de migration, intégration, assimilation, carrière, réseaux sociaux

Resumen

El artículo ofrece un marco teórico relativamente nuevo, articulando niveles de análisis macro, meso y micro del proceso de migración, que generalmente están desconectados en la sociología de la migración. Este enfoque alternativo se basa en el clásico concepto sociológico de carrera. El concepto de carrera migratoria integra estructuras de oportunidades, características individuales y redes para dar sentido a la experiencia migratoria. Este concepto nos ayuda a llenar el vacío entre los estudiosos de la migración y el movimiento de personas, por un lado, y los estudiosos de la integración y la incorporación en el nuevo país, por otra parte. Carrera migratoria debe ser considerada como un concepto adicional a los conceptos tradicionales, como la integración, la asimilación o incorporación, que se centran principalmente en la situación de los migrantes en el país receptor. Además, el uso del concepto de carrera migratoria permite conectar el pensamiento teórico sobre la migración para incorporar las teorías sociológicas.

Palabras clave

Proceso de migración, integración, incorporación, carrera, redes sociales